

PART 3.

Third
Series

MARCH,
1889.

VOL
1

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

&
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

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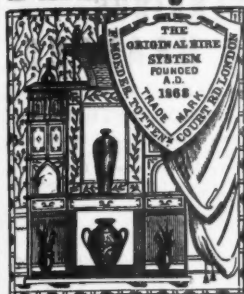
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THE custom of taking medicine in the form of pills dates far back in history. The object is to enable us to swallow easily in a condensed form disagreeable and nauseous, but very useful drugs. To what vast dimensions pill-taking has grown may be imagined when we say that in England alone about 2,000,000,000 (two thousand million) pills are consumed every year. In early days pills were made slowly by hand, as the demand was comparatively small. To-day they are produced with infinitely greater rapidity by machines especially contrived for the purpose, and with greater accuracy, too, in the proportions of the various ingredients employed.

No form of medication can be better than a pill, provided only it is intelligently prepared. But right here occurs the difficulty. Easy as it may seem to make a pill, or a million of them, there are really very few pills that can be honestly commended for popular use. Most of them either undershoot or overshoot the mark. As everybody takes pills of some kind, it may be well to mention what a good, safe, and reliable pill should be. Now, when one feels dull and sleepy, and has more or less pain in the head, sides, and back, he may be sure his bowels are constipated, and his liver sluggish. To remedy this unhappy state of things there is nothing like a good cathartic pill. It will act like a charm by stimulating the liver into doing its duty, and ridding the digestive organs of the accumulated poisonous matter.

But the good pill does not gripe and pain us, neither does it make us sick and miserable for a few hours, or a whole day. It acts on the entire glandular system at the same time, else the after effects of the pill will be worse than the disease itself. The griping caused

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The largest Medical Electrical Institute in the world. Sufferers should call if possible and personally inspect the Belts before purchasing them.

APPEALS.

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FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CONDITION OF THE POOR BY PERSONAL AND ASSOCIATED CHARITY, IRRESPECTIVE OF CLASS AND SECT.

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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 10.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1889.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

LOUIS DRAYCOTT.

By MRS. R. S. DE COURCY LAFFAN.

Author of "Geoffrey Stirling," etc. etc.

BOOK I.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

TOLD BY CANDACE BIRT.

CHAPTER I. IN A CUL-DE-SAC.

I AM perfectly willing to admit that our house is in a "no-thoroughfare," and might have a livelier look-out; on the other hand, we have not half so much traffic as if we were open at both ends, instead of only at one; and, on a quiet summer's afternoon, the rattle of the cans in the premises of the "Country Dairy," just behind our little street, gives quite a rural atmosphere to the whole place. Three cows under a shed constitute the "dairy," and one of them has a bell round her neck. When she shakes her patient head it tinkles with a low, mellow sound, and Sister Charlotte—when in one of her calm, happy moods—will say, as she listens, "Sister Dacie, I feel as if I were on the side of a Swiss mountain, in the heart of a beautiful country."

This is very comforting for me; since foreign travel has often been suggested as likely to do my sister good, though we have never been able to afford it. I think the mignonette in the window-box, to which I devote so much care, has something to say to these pleasant and wholesome fancies, for when the breeze comes stealing in across its crowded ranks of spiral pale-green flowers, our little parlour smells as sweet as though it were some rustic bower. I am always very glad when anything has a soothing effect

upon Sister Charlotte, and so is Kezia, for at times—

However, I must try to tell my story; to put in all the pretty glancing lights—and the grey and black shadows, too—without saying anything ill-natured or hard of any one.

First of all, I had perhaps better explain how I came to have such an outlandish name. Not long before I was born, my good mother, piously reading her Bible, was struck with the title of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, and straightway, when I came into this troublous world, the dark-browed Queen became my name-mother. Candace quickly dwindled, in our nursery days, to Dacie; and, as I settled down into an old maid and Sister Charlotte's nurse, that became, in its turn, Sister Dacie—at your service—a small, brown-haired woman, with insignificant features, and no presence to speak of; easily frightened by the mildest cow lurching along on its way to the meadow, and chronically haunted by the fear of what the horse may do, whenever she drives in cab or brougham, 'bus or Irish car.

Indeed, I can hardly call to mind that I, Candace Birt, am particularly gifted or valuable to my fellow-creatures, looked at in any aspect save one or two very commonplace ones. I have a good stock of patience, and I think I am rather a good hand at loving, when I set myself to it—tenacious in my hold, I mean, and made happy by little things.

As to Sister Charlotte, she is five years older than I am, and was once a beauty. Hers is a story to make your heart bleed in the thinking of it; the story of a love which had to be laid aside, beaten down, buried out of sight; and which turned to bitterness in the end. Upstairs

in the front bedroom, in an old box that is never opened, lies what was to have been her wedding-dress. I dare say its folds would all fall asunder now if they were opened out, and that the sprigs of lavender she made me scatter over it, are nothing but little flecks of grey dust. Happy and beautiful, loving and loved, so soon to be a bride—then came the end. I mean the end to the love-story. An unheeding step on the stairs, a fall, a twisted limb, a face pale with anguish and fear, and then long years upon a couch of feebleness and pain, with no one but Sister Dacie to keep her company. And so it came about that God set my life before me as He would have it. For the thing was plain enough, as any one with half an eye could see; and so I told Mr. Green. He was the curate, and I had helped him a good deal in his work among the poor. I had even fancied that I might be of still greater help to him in a time to come. I had fancied that he thought so too. But now, there lay what could not be put aside straight before my face, and I told him that, that was how it must be, since Charlotte (we used to call her Lottie then) and I stood alone in the world, and had no one but each other. Mr. Green—I know it is not a romantic name, but it had grown to have a sort of music of its own for me—looked at me very gravely while I told him all about our trouble, and what the doctors said about Sister Charlotte. Then he turned aside a few moments, and I squeezed one of my hands in the other as tight as I could to keep the tears from starting.

It may seem rather a foolish thing to mention, and rather improbable, too, to some people, but he kissed my hand when he went away. I had on black gloves stitched with violet, and I kept the one his lips had touched; I kept it always. It is in the upper part of my desk under a heap of old letters. Every woman likes to think some bit of homage has been given to her in her life; and the little black glove means all kinds of dead possibilities to me.

This was how it came about that Sister Charlotte and I set out upon our life's journey together, each with our broken story; but hers so much the sadder and more pitiful of the two, that mine hardly deserves thinking of beside it, and has only been mentioned as a passing detail.

I see that I have mentioned Kezia, therefore I had better explain who she is.

She is our household factotum, our right hand; now and again, our tyrant.

Kezia is shaped like a cheap wooden doll. Her mouth, wide and thin-lipped, becomes a mere transverse line when she is in one of her obstinate moods. Her face is lined and wrinkled like the rind of an apple that has been laid by towards the Christmas mince-meat; her eye, keen, and for ever closely focussed upon the petty tradesman, distrusting him with a steady persistency; her gait, jerky, angular, and—when things in the house go criss-cross—spasmodic, is at times trying to an invalid. Indeed, I have a difficult part to play between the two of them sometimes. I mean with Sister Charlotte and Kezia, though, to be sure, no one who knows Sister Charlotte's story, could wonder at any irritability on her part; and, as to Kezia, I have only shown one side of her yet, and that the rough one. The gap between heroism and obstinacy is often not a wide one, and easily bridged over. Perhaps heroism is only obstinacy disciplined and sanctified.

At all events, if the rough side of Kezia was obstinacy, the softer side was heroism.

Once upon a time, Sister Charlotte being in a state of greater suffering than usual, I happened to be sent for on an errand that could take no denial. On a certain night during my absence, our good doctor ordered Sister Charlotte an opiate to lull pain and procure sleep. The potion was given, and the sufferer slept.

Kezia, always beset with fears of burglars, and doubly careful in Miss Dacie's absence, went round the house to see that all fastenings were secure. By some evil chance she got the fingers of her hands jammed in the window sash, and found herself a prisoner. She was in the room below that in which Sister Charlotte lay asleep. There Kezia remained, caught like a rat in a trap, silent, uncomplaining, all through the long hours of darkness; waiting in quiet, resolute endurance for the dawn that would mean help and deliverance.

The commonplace treads on the heels of the sublime. The milkman was Kezia's Perseus; and, as the strain relaxed, as the poor, crushed fingers—purple with the long-continued pressure—were set free, the faithful creature fell back without life or motion, as true a martyr as ever was bound to wheel or stake.

Her own account of the affair was simple enough.

"If I'd set up a noise, happen I might

have waked Miss Charlotte, an' I know'd that 'ud be a bad job when she'd took the sleepin' stuff; so I thought I'd best bide."

So Kezia "bided;" and no one can wonder that, from that time, we looked upon her rough, north-country ways as the hard husk that held a tender and juicy kernel. As for Sister Charlotte, when I told her all about that vigil of pain, she lay quite still, with her face to the wall, for a bit, and then asked for her handkerchief.

"I think I must have taken a little cold in my head, when you kept the window open so late the other evening, Sister Dacie," she said. That is the way with Sister Charlotte: she had to beat down all the tender impulses of her nature so cruelly once, that now they seldom show signs of life, and, if they do, she ignores them. But I noticed that she was very tolerant of Kezia's peculiarities for a long time to come.

I have seemingly wandered far from the no-thoroughfare that calls itself Prospect Place, apparently in the pure spirit of irony, since neither side has any prospect at all, save into the windows of the side opposite.

We at number eight have one distinct advantage over our neighbours. In our back-garden towers a tall and stately poplar-tree, looking, I doubt not, sadly out of place, ridiculously like a very big plant in a very little flower-pot to many eyes, but a mine of content to us, who are quite given, indeed, to dating our small household record of events from its seasons. In spring, golden scrolls, formed of myriad buds, creep up its bare, brown sides; these in their turn grow green, expand, and rustle pleasantly as the wind stirs them. Quite a colony of birds inhabit the branches of this tree of ours, chasing each other up and down its stately height, querulous, chirping, happy little creatures, warily watched by the black cat next door, who squats upon the wall, and turns a pair of green eyes upwards, longingly, then feigns a dreamless sleep, in the hope that some too trustful songster may hop within reach of her stealthy claw. We like to hear the soft swirl of the poplar's plumed head in the autumn wind, and measure the fall of the year by the leaves that strew the garden with a brown-and-amber carpet. It is not much to pride oneself upon, I dare say; but still, we consider our poplar-tree a distinction.

As to the house itself, I am not in a

position to deny that it has its defects. The back parlours are darker than might be wished, and the most indiscreet revelations as to the garments of the neighbours on either side, are, as it were, forced upon one's reluctant observation on washing-days—epochs which seem to be moveable feasts, usually celebrated upon any day that a visitor from the country stays to lunch with us.

The front parlour is consecrated to Sister Charlotte; and there I congregate together everything that is best and brightest of our joint possessions. To one whom infirmity chains to a couch, the room in which her life is passed is her world. And I always bear this in mind, bringing home a bunch of flowers from the green-grocer's round the corner, whenever I can, and setting them out to the best advantage in an old china bowl which belonged to a great-aunt of ours, and always stands on the little table in the window. Sometimes Sister Charlotte will notice the flowers, and sometimes she will not; but there is always the chance that she may, and that is something. Even when they are cheapest, I never bring home roses. They used to be my sister's favourite flowers; and her lover had brought her a bunch of them on that fatal day long ago, when one false step blighted two lives, and all the roses died out of hers for ever.

I really flatter myself that our front parlour is a credit to us; for, though the chairs are old and spindle-legged, they have an air of well-preserved gentility; and the centre ottoman which Charlotte and I worked when we were two slips of girls, is no ordinary piece of furniture, and is most useful in preventing people knocking their heads against the chandelier. That chandelier is a scar, a defect, as we are always ready to acknowledge. But, then, as Sister Charlotte pithily observes, "Are there not spots even upon the sun? Why, therefore, should we expect perfection to be ours in every detail of household arrangement?"

The great thing is to bear that chandelier in mind, and not get up too suddenly when seated on the centre ottoman. So that, you see, nothing more than a little care and thought is needed to make things thoroughly smooth and comfortable.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, has passed over our heads in Prospect Place, and each has shown but little variation. Our dear invalid being a little better or a little

worse; the enormities of the neighbouring tradesmen as reported by Kezia; the reprehensible conduct of the postman in coming to us on New Year's morning decidedly the worse for the refreshment partaken of so early in the day; these, and such-like ups and downs, formed the ripples on our shallow sea.

Of course, there were always our Indian letters, which had to be read, and re-read, and brightened up all the week, and which had to be answered—I writing, and Sister Charlotte dictating, and Kezia putting in a message with "her duty" to Master Randall. As a matter of fact, our brother Randall is Major in the Madras Native Infantry; but titles of any kind are but as empty sounds to Kezia, she having been known to speak of our most gracious sovereign lady as "Mrs. Victory," so "Captain Randall Birt, M.N.I.," was just "Master Randall" to Kezia, and would remain so, in spite of any giddy heights of promotion to which he might attain. These letters, coming to us from a far-off land, are among the bright and sun-tipped ripples of our lives—things to talk over, and dwell upon to our friends; events that give a certain stamp to us in our grey existences, as those who possessed distinguished relatives abroad.

"Have you heard from India lately?" was a common form of enquiry put by our visitors, not without some reverence and awe, and addressed to us as though that mighty continent were in some sort annexed to Prospect Place, and our brother were Governor-General, at least. At this Sister Charlotte would bridle, and, so to speak, prance a little on her sofa, bringing out bits of Randall's last letter with an air of reservation, as who should say: "More remains behind, but I wish to give you only such information as is likely not to cause you any inconvenient emotion of astonishment."

All this was very delightful to us both; for, though I seldom said much, I always sat by, and nodded and smiled at all the full stops.

Randall is some years younger than either of us, and still, in Kezia's estimation at least, but "a bold sauce-box of a little chap as you'd see in a day's journey," though, in reality, as he has several times told us in his letters, growing bald on the crown, and showing various other ill-effects of his fifteen years' service in India.

It is strange how different things appear

seen through different mediums. Never had the front parlour at Prospect Place seemed so old-fashioned, never had the chandelier seemed so assertive, as when I stood looking at it all, with a letter of Randall's in my hand—a letter that held for us, his sisters, a wonderful message.

Our brother is coming home—will, indeed, be with us almost as soon as his letter.

He has had fever and ague; he will need care and nursing. I am all in a tremble at this marvellous news, and soon I can see neither parlour nor chandelier for the rising tears. It seems so strange that mother should not be here to welcome back the boy who left her fifteen years ago; that there are only Charlotte and Dacie to greet him. But he is not a boy now.

I must remember that. I must ponder on the little bald patch that he has told us of among his curly locks. I must try and put from my mind the slender stripling who caught me for one wild moment to his breast; the boy whose hot tears fell like rain upon my face; the boy cried to me between the sobs to go to the mother whom he never saw again, and then pushed me from him and passed me by. I must forget all this, and think of my brother as a man of the world, a man of experience, a man of mark and position.

There is one thing upon which I really think we may congratulate ourselves. The poplar-tree is at its very best; the golden scrolls, embroidered by the hand of Spring, make it quite beautiful, and tender tufts of leaves are all about its plume-like head.

I feel that our brother Randall will be impressed by it; and I am glad the poplar-tree has put on such a pretty dress to welcome the boy home.

I know it sounds ridiculous to speak of Randall as "the boy;" but mother did so to the last.

"Tell the boy," she said, "that I——"

Tell the boy—what?

We knew not; for, on the wing of that half-uttered message, the loving spirit passed. It was something sweet, for there was a smile upon her lips in the saying of it—a smile that lingered in her dead face to the last.

And now the boy is coming home, and she is not here to give him greeting.

CHAPTER II. AFTER LONG YEARS.

RANDALL has been home nearly a month now. I cannot deny that his first appear-

ance was something of a surprise to us. Indeed, Kezia fell down the kitchen-stairs with a crash in her agitation and dismay.

"Yon!" she said, "does yon be Master Randall? Lord ha' mussy on us all, Miss Dacie, this here blessed day!"

Then she flung her apron over her head, so as to guard against a second shock, and sat down behind the scullery-door—a retreat she much affected in difficult moments.

As for Sister Charlotte and myself, we certainly thought our brother both shorter and stouter in figure than we had imagined him to be. In thinking of him as our family hero, we had drawn out his proportions in our mind's eye, forgetting that he had never been among the great ones of the earth. However, when he laughed, we recognised "the boy" by the old twinkle in his eyes, and Charlotte came to think that the bald patch on his crown conferred a certain dignity upon him.

He expressed himself charmed with Prospect Place, and quite fell in with our estimation of the poplar-tree. Of course there was much pathos underlying our pleasure in Randall's home-coming; and it was nearly a week before any one of the three of us spoke of mother. Sister Charlotte's sad story, too, was for a time untouched upon; but one night, after she had gone to bed, Randall and I spoke of it together.

Telling a thing is always quite different to writing it; and I think my brother understood the matter after this conversation much better than he had done before. I wished that he might do so, because he would then be more ready to make allowance for—well, be good and patient with Charlotte when one of her bad days came. All the more so, since I could fully explain to him how the doctors were of opinion that a strong, nervous, and hysterical element had latterly taken the place of actual disease in our sister's condition, and that she was very reluctant to allow that perhaps less care and nursing were needful than heretofore, and that a little effort on her own part was occasionally called for.

My tears fell fast as I told him about the wedding-dress laid by in the old box upstairs, with the sprigs of lavender lying here and there among the folds. After we had done talking about poor Lottie, Randall put a sudden question to me.

"There was a Mr.—White—or was it Brown, we used to tease you about, Dacie?

What became of him? He had Sunday Schools on the brain, if I remember rightly; but was a good little man, take him all round."

"Very good; his name was Green. He left the parish shortly after Lottie's accident. He—went abroad. Perhaps, you will remember he always had a great idea of missionary work."

Randall looked at me sharply for a moment, and then he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and patted me ever so gently. "Poor lass!" he said, and kissed me long and tenderly.

I really could not see anything for a moment or two, and, when I looked up, my brother was gone. I laughed as I lighted my candle to go to bed.

Fancy being called a "lass" at my time of life!

But it was all very sweet; like some softening balsam laid upon the scar of an old wound.

As time went on we saw what havoc Indian service had played with Randall's constitution.

He was always suffering from what he calls jungle ague. He was always either in a hot fit, or a fit of chills, or getting better from the two combined. It may therefore well be imagined that he needed all the cheerful society we could get for him, and that when Sister Charlotte had one of her bad days at the same time that Randall either burnt, or shivered, or did each alternately, Kezia and I were rather hard pressed. Fortunately it was spring-time, and several of our nicest hand-organs began to pay periodical visits to Prospect Place, while the one with a monkey returned from a long visit to the south-coast watering places, and Randall was quite amused by the little creature's recognition of me, and his efforts to embrace Kezia.

Still, as I said to Sister Charlotte, these are amusements which pall upon a man accustomed to a wider sphere and larger aspects of nature, and it is also detrimental for a person to concentrate himself upon his own ailments; to watch himself shake with ague, and speculate upon his probable temperature when in the clutch of fever. The taking of large doses of quinine can hardly be looked upon, either, as an enlivening manner of passing the time away; and, in short, a small tea-party appeared to me the thing called for at such a crisis. Kezia had to have a week's notice at least on such an occasion; for jumbles, and sponge-cakes that will stand up straight and

spiky, are not things to be undertaken lightly, or trifled with in the execution.

Of course we decided that this entertainment of ours must be the selectest thing possible, including only the very *crème-de-la-crème* of our circle of friends.

Necessarily we must ask Mrs. Alison McGregor. Military people understand one another. There is a certain "tone" about them that ensures mutual appreciation. Then, both my brother and Mrs. McGregor had been in India—a fact which alone must draw them naturally the one to the other. Lucille—we call Mrs. McGregor by her Christian name, for we are really quite intimate with her—had been away on a visit to some relatives of her late husband, and that was how it comes about that she and Randall had not met before.

Lucille is, in our estimation, a charming person, and I felt sure she would look upon it as a Christian duty to assist us in cheering and amusing my brother, and helping him over his hot fits, and his cold fits, and the periods of depression that came between. She was a woman of that pleasant, hazy age called "about thirty," slight and graceful in figure, and of a naturally bright and gentle disposition. We had never known her in the craped and capped condition of widowhood; and from all we had heard, she must have been glad to lay aside with those trappings of woe, all remembrance of the late Colonel Alison McGregor, except such slender kindly memories as survive in a womanly heart, while all the blacker records of the past are blotted out.

Lucille had a quantity of bright brown hair piled high upon her head, in a fashion but rarely seen. She had quiet, grey eyes that looked sad enough at times, and yet sparkled merrily when she sat beside poor Lottie's couch and told her something droll to charm the pain away for the moment.

We had never heard anything but what was good of Alison McGregor's widow. With the poor materials Fate had given her, she made as good a home as she could for the man whose evil temper and selfish tyranny did their best to blight her young life altogether. Unprotected by the shield of a husband's love and care, she had to face all the temptations of social surroundings, in which adulation is to be had by any woman who chooses to accept it—and to face them alone. In this trying position her womanly dignity did not desert her. She had many friends, but no lover;

managed to be thoroughly popular, but was never "talked about;" remained domestic and home-loving, where many would have been the contrary; mourned the temper of her Colonel; suffered his cruelties—for it had come to that—with dignity and patience, making no moan and asking for no pity; and nursed him with devotion when the end came.

What more could mortal woman do to merit the love and tenderness of other women, and the reverence of men?

We told Randall her sad story, and he took the kindest interest in it all. He said such women were the "salt of the earth," which I thought neatly put. He said that to come out purified and strengthened from such trials, was a higher and, in one sense, better lot than the happiest life could ever attain to; and that before such a woman he would stand bare-headed, as though on holy ground. He said it was such an easy thing for a woman to lead a good life, and make a good end, if she had a happy home about her and a good husband to walk through life beside her. She ought to be ashamed of herself if she didn't. But when there was nothing to help, and anything to hinder, then came the "tug of war." This was Randall's military way of putting things, of course, and I thought it very telling.

We were quite delighted to see him take such a warm interest in anything, and I told Kezia, who was mixing the batter for the jumbles, that the Captain seemed to like being told about Mrs. McGregor, and all her troubles; to which Kezia replied: "Does he now, ma'am? Well, any one would, you know. She's that sort, you see—so bright and pleasant-spoke—what you may call takin' in her ways, ain't she, now? And it's loike enoo'—"

But here Kezia stopped short, stared hard at me—rather rudely, I thought. Then she opened her mouth as if to speak again—I could almost have fancied, to say something unpleasant. Anyway, she thought better of it, whatever it was; closed her thin lips tight in the transverse line of which I have spoken elsewhere, and set to stirring the batter like mad.

That is the worst of Kezia—she is not always as respectful as she might be. But I find it easy to forgive her anything, if I just glance at the front parlour window. By the way, Randall tried to speak a word to her about that night of martyrdom, and I am sorry to say she retreated to the kitchen, and slammed the door in his face.

Nothing could be more successful than our tea party. The jumbles were light as snowflakes; the sponge-cake, in the middle of the table, was like a minaretted tower. Lucille, too, who had only returned home the day before, looked her best. She wore a pale grey dress, and a bunch of pink erica, and looked altogether delightful. Randall was most kind to her; and they chatted away together in the back-parlour—for this was an occasion that called for the opening of the folding-doors—all about India and Indian ways, and Indian life, until it really seemed as if they might have known each other all their lives. This was, of course, highly satisfactory; and Charlotte, receiving our friends as she lay in state, as it were, upon her sofa, nodded and smiled, and even went as near to winking as a lady may, every time I looked at her. Indeed, I hardly knew Randall, so different did he appear from anything he had shown us of himself since his return. For the time being, I am convinced he had forgotten all about the hot fits and the cold fits, and the depression in between; and, for the first time, really enjoyed himself. Twice he sang—the old, old songs that I remembered long ago—and sang them with such pathos that the tears rose to my silly old eyes, and a choking came in my throat. I seemed to see him once more, a boy with golden curls, dressed in a little black-velvet dress, called, if I remember right, a "Spanish suit," standing by mother's knees, with one hand clasped in hers, and lifting up his clear, sweet voice, like a young thrush in spring-time. Oh! the pride in her dear, loving face, as she listened! Woe betide the careless one who should break that flow of harmony by the slightest jarring sound! Woe betide the guest whose attention might be suspected of wandering even for a moment!

The old songs called up the old memories; and when I heard our excellent Vicar, the Rev. Abner Candytuft, in his flowery fashion, entreating my brother to "allow himself to be prevailed upon to sing once more," I had hardly voice to add my own request—in simpler language—to his.

Randall did sing again. He gave us, "Oft in the still night," and though the freshness of his voice was gone, the pathos remained, and our guests listened entranced, while once more my own thoughts centred on the past, for that song was one of mother's favourites in the dear days of long ago.

After this Lucille joined her soft contralto notes to Randall's tenor in one or two simple, old-fashioned duets. They said it was wonderful how their voices harmonised; as, indeed, it was, considering they had never sung together before. Altogether, our tea-party may said to have been a great success, and I felt sure that such cheerful and refined society must be an admirable thing to divert Randall's mind, and prevent him dwelling upon the state of his health.

I said so next morning to Kezia, and I must say her behaviour struck me at the time as not exactly what it ought to be. It has been said that old and trusted servants are apt to take too much license towards their betters, and I felt upon this occasion that there was some truth in the saying. Kezia looked at me, and burst into a short, quickly-suppressed laugh; and then went into the scullery, threw her apron over her head, and sat down behind the door after her usual fashion. I did not choose to stay and argue with her.

I told Sister Charlotte of Kezia's conduct, and she mentioned it to Randall, who was evidently much displeased, for he flushed up to the roots of his hair, so that I really feared it might bring on one of his fever-fits.

However, no ill effects ensued, and we were both quite pleased to find that, on one occasion, he had—when out for a walk in that direction—called upon, and had tea with, Lucille.

"There can be nothing," said Sister Charlotte, oracularly, "like bringing those together who have sympathies and experiences in common. I already see a vast change for the better in our brother Randall; he takes a livelier interest in things, takes a pride in himself, and—yes, Sister Dacie—I am really convinced that his ague fits are fewer and farther between."

Which was certainly the case.

After this, he got quite into the habit of taking tea with Lucille, and, if he chanced to go out of an afternoon, Kezia never brought in more than two cups.

Kezia is certainly a most extraordinary woman, and takes the oddest notions into her head; she evidently fancies that our Randall is going back to India again, for she asked me if we should want "the extra girl when the Major was away." Now, I had told her that Randall had gone upon half-pay, and I thought her rather wooden-headed in the matter. I

told him so; and then I was sorry I had mentioned it, he got so red and looked so fierce.

"Kezia is a meddling old woman," he said, "and I don't see why you and Lottie should talk over your own affairs and other people's too, with a person of that sort; however, Kezia is quite right, I am going away—not very far, though, Dacie. I am going to marry Mrs. McGregor."

I heard a gasp from the sofa, and knew that Sister Charlotte was going to have one of her hysterical attacks, so I had no time to stop and think what my own feelings were at this announcement. I called Kezia, and sent Randall away, fearing that the sight of him might cause renewed paroxysms; and then I said—with as casual an air as I could well summon up:

"Miss Charlotte is upset by some sudden news: the Major is—going to be married."

"I knowed it," said Kezia, stolidly.

She did not ask who the lady was, neither did I say. We just employed ourselves in rubbing the palms of Sister Charlotte's hands, and putting smelling-salts and aromatic vinegar to her nose.

She revived more quickly and completely than is usual with her on such occasions, and, rather to my surprise, sat up and began to talk quite cheerfully of Randall's engagement.

After all, when we came to consider the matter calmly and dispassionately, what had we to find fault with?

Lucille had made a good wife to a very bad husband. The departed McGregor had been an ill-tempered and ill-conditioned man all round. She had humoured him. She had made the best of him. Randall—especially when a little agueish—was inclined to be irritable; she would humour him. She had been proved in the fire of trial, and had come forth strengthened and purified. There was no doubt as to how she would "turn out;" the past was a guarantee for the future.

Then—as Sister Charlotte observed—"What is so natural as that military people should take to one another?"

Kezia came in with the tea.

Only two cups stood on the tray.

"The Major is not out," I said, with a glance at the table.

"He will be," said she; and, true enough, at that moment down came Randall, with his light dust-coat on, and his gloves in his hand. He stood there, looking at us;

and oh! what kind, sweet eyes he has! They are just like mother's, with the very same look of light and love, when he is happy and pleased.

"Have you two anything to say to me?" he said.

Kezia—failing in her usual good manners—stood at the door as if spell-bound. Sister Charlotte lay back on the sofa and closed her eyes.

As for me, I just caught Randall round the neck and hugged him. At which Kezia ran madly down the kitchen-stairs, gurgling and sobbing as she went.

"There—there—that will do," said Randall; "and now, have you anything to say to—Lucille?"

Sister Charlotte sat up suddenly.

"Bring her back with you," she said, and lay down again.

There never was such a woman for taking a sound, practical, common-sense view of things as Sister Charlotte!

GOSSIP ON BEAUTY.

I WONDER whether that line in a certain poem, "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be pretty," ever gave contentment to the maiden who read it, and realised, after a look in the glass, that she was one of those to whom the circular letter of counsel was addressed. Certainly virtue is of vastly more worth than beauty; but how delicious it must be to be supremely beautiful! The tribute paid by the world to the good is not, on the whole, despicable; but it is in that curious cold currency of esteem, which is so seldom received at its right value. On the other hand, the adoration that beauty compels is in the eyes of the multitude. There is no mistaking it, nor will it bear depreciation. "Oh, I am beautiful; I am really beautiful," sobs to herself, with a thrill of ecstasy, the enchanted girl who has marked—and, let us hope, with bashful colour in her cheeks—the gaze of the world upon her, perhaps for the first time. There is more conviction in admiring eyes than in the looking-glass, and the ten thousand apostrophes of a lady's-maid.

And yet, is there so much in beauty as we are prone to think? Of course, I do not refer to the estimate formed by the young. That is nothing less than chimerical. At a certain epoch of our life we are intoxicated by a pretty face. There is no thinking of aught else while the memory of

it is fresh; and if the pretty face itself be ever before us, we are led irresistibly to sacrifice to it in one foolish way or another. At such a time the person who talks to us in a tone of frigid calculation, about our imbecility, risks his life. We cast his words back in his teeth, if we do no worse; and anathematise him both for his blindness and his impertinence. It is the fervid time when there is no sunlight to equal the radiance of a maiden's eyes; when we could better dispense with all the planetary systems than her sweet glances—

O looko, O shine, O let me die, and see,

It was all very well for Guido Guinicelli to sing, six and a half centuries ago, about Cupid's predilections for tender natures. The little rascal is quite indiscriminate in his wooings for temporary domicile. And one may imagine with what a scoff of stern passion the love-torn soul of the average youth of our own dear land may welcome Guido's tranquil words:

Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,
As birds within the green shade of the grove.
Before the gentle heart in Nature's scheme,
Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.

But to return. Do not even we who have done with delirium pay too great homage to beauty? Yes, without doubt, say certain of our instructors. You bow the knee to a mere attribute which, in spite of Plato and all his class, argues no essential and sterling merit in the possessor. It were different, of course, could the beautiful woman share her sweet dower with others, like the inheritor of a colossal fortune. Or if she could strike forth from it something of service to the race, like the person of uncommon mental gifts. But beauty is powerless to serve any one except the possessor; and the service it renders her is very often of the most lamentable kind. No, friends, say these teachers; you degrade yourselves in bending the knee to a girl just because she has bright eyes, a fine figure, or a lovely complexion; and you injure her by making her esteem herself above her worth.

So far in opposition. But it must be remembered that these detractors of the beautiful are frequently people of a mature age who, by a severe course of discipline, have weaned themselves from the simple and natural tastes which belong to most of us. Also—and it must be said in sorrow—they are not seldom persons of the softer sex, who, being uncomely themselves, make a systematic war upon comeliness in others.

Their hearts are of marble, and their intelligences steeped in gall. Shall they, then, assume to answer for the rest of us? I trow not. Let them take a place on the platform by the side of the fair whom they assail, and let their arguments be weighed against the silent face of their victim.

I fear, in such a case, their rhetoric would speed unheard to the ceiling, while we of the jury offered sacrifice of our eyes and judgement at the same time.

Sydney Smith may speak on this subject for the majority: "The information of very plain women is so inconsiderable, that I set . . . no very great store by it. . . . Where I have seen fine eyes, a beautiful complexion, grace and symmetry in women, I have generally thought them amazingly well-informed and extremely philosophical. In contrary instances, seldom or never."

What do children think of beauty? The question is worth asking, if only that the answer may show that there is no rule absolute of beauty, whereby the old and the young alike are brought under its sway. But according to the philosopher Tucker—for whose coarseness we offer apology to those who require it—"one cannot discover that little children have any notion of beauty at all; they will turn away from the sight of a celebrated toast, with all her tackle, trim, and bravery on, to hide their faces in the flabby bosom of an old, wrinkled nurse."

Tucker speaks for the seventeenth century. I am disposed to think the children of our age are a little shrewder in this particular. An American of five or six is apt to be a keen critic of the physiognomy. But this precocity cannot be taken as the standard, and so the fact may stand unchanged that, to the child, there is no such thing as beauty.

On the other hand, what have the old—who know all that human life can teach—to say upon this subject? Do they hail with immeasurable joy the promise of great beauty in their grandchildren? Not exactly. Yet are they not insensible to the worth of this dower of Nature. They regard it as a boon—but a boon hedged with so many counterbalancing perils, that it is doubtful whether it be or be not a blessing.

Who does not know the kind of exclamations uttered by a knot of veterans when a pretty girl enters the room? "Ah, she has a future, poor thing!" "She will slay her thousands some day!" "I hope her heart is as sweet as her face!" "We

are beat off; we can look at her and retain our senses, while those youngsters do not know whether they are on their heads or their heels." And so forth.

It is a moot point whether a life of obscurity or of conspicuousness is the better life. It depends upon the subject. But, whatever her inclinations may be, the pretty girl is, as a rule, not allowed to bloom in secret. The world conspires that it may see much of her. Thus there is like to be an excessive test of her various faculties. Her sisters, who are plain, go through life smoothly enough upon their average allotment of virtues and wits. But she finds herself in strange situations for which she is wholly unprepared. How, then, may she keep her footing, unless she be gifted in heart and head as liberally as in the sunshine of her face?

Doubtless it was the realisation of the more prominent position in the walk of life which beauty afforded a person, with the accompanying exercise of the faculties of the mind, that largely led the old Greeks to assume that a beautiful body was the habitation of an uncommon mind.

It is curious, always instructive, but not always edifying, to mark the brisk maturing of a pretty girl. She is in the way of the friction of life. Sometimes it is genuinely educative to her; but she must not have stones of censure cast at her if it be otherwise, for that is what it is most apt to be. She needs more bulwarks than her sisters.

"Beauty, where there is a beam of light to show the virtues of the mind, is a blessing to be wished for," says Mrs. Delany, speaking both from experience and knowledge, "but if its allurements only discover folly and sin, it is then a curse indeed."

There is, in truth, no sager person of the world than a discreet "beauty" in her fifth season, unless it be an old woman who, in her day, made wide havoc among the hearts of mankind. Instinctively they accept the impulse which leads them to exclaim with Corisca, in "The Faithful Shepherd": "What use is beauty if it be not seen? . . . It is a beautiful woman's honour and glory to be loved of many."

Our beauty is to us,
As fierceness to the lion,
As genius to man—

Let us then use it while we have it.

And in the time of afterglow, when many a fair face is itself again, in spite of wrinkles and grey hair, they can live through the days of their youth once more

in recalling the haps and hazards they incurred in this declaration of their beauty before the eyes of the world.

. . . when'er a thought I cast
On all the joys of youth and beauty pass'd,
To find in pleasures I have had my part,
Still warms me to the bottom of my heart.

But if, to children, beauty is as if it were not, and to the old something upon which to impale a moral rather than to defer to, how does it affect the rest of us, who make the great majority? Do we agree with the detractor, who,

To all apparent beauties blind,
tries to convince us that the admirer of beauty is on a par with the heathen of Central Africa, who humble themselves before fetishes of wood and stone? We do not agree with her. Her words may be listened to in default of other employment, but at sight of a fair face they are forgotten, like the tissue of a dream an hour after waking. There is something so divine about beauty, that even when we feel no overwhelming affection for a beautiful woman, we cannot but think of her with a sort of reverence—and this, strange to say, though she be in truth no very good woman in character and disposition.

As for the charge that beauty is powerless to serve any one except its possessor, it really needs no refutation. What of the inspiration that in all ages has flashed forth from bright eyes? Is there no dynamic force in that? Cannot such inspiration carry a man farther than the hope of pecuniary reward, or of Victoria Crosses, and other public marks of distinction—farther even than the purest spirit of patriotism? Surely there is no disputing it. Something might be said about the age of chivalry, in particular, upon this subject. But it was an age less truly chivalrous than one is disposed to fancy that it was. Only in its assumptions may we recall it. "God and the ladies" was the watchword of those times; and though as a rule there was as little genuine respect paid to the ladies as to the Deity by the knights of the Middle Ages, there were not wanting some noble souls who were as ready to die for the sake of the fair, as for what in all earnestness they conceived to be "the honour and glory of God," in Palestine and elsewhere.

But there is no need to search the records of past centuries for instances of the high inspiration of beauty. Every town has its hundreds of men at this

moment who work by no other light than this: "If only I may win her love, I shall be content. But she is so pure and spotless a being, such an angel upon earth, that I almost despair of being able to do that which shall win her. Almost, but not quite. And so I will do my best, and Heaven guide the issue."

Every village has its one man, at fewest, who stands the more upright for the thought that the girl of his admiration may be looking at him, and whose mind is, for the moment, at least, freed from all base and unholy ideas. And, far and wide, on every sea, and in every land, there are men going to and fro, whose better natures are kept fortified mainly by this same ennobling hope—that one day such an one may find him worthy of her.

Beauty of no service save to the possessor! Why, it is the very essence of the ideal, which leavens into fertility our somewhat dull and cloddish masculine nature! From the days of Troy, battles have been won through it. Art has ever ardently acknowledged that there is no influence in life to equal it. And literature is in the same case. "Never," says Alfieri, "did I find myself in a fitter state for literary work than when I was actuated by the desire to present my productions to her who inspired me with this omnipotent passion."

Beauty is, indeed, often the very breath of life to the imagination. Without the fair face of Laura, Petrarch's sweet verse could never have had being. Had not Dante known Beatrice, we should have lost much. And so on in a thousand instances. Beauty is the completest of intellectual alchemists. The man who heretofore has stammered out his thoughts with pain and effort, suddenly finds his tongue loosed. He is eloquent all at once, to a marvel; and a fair face is the sole cause of it.

Stella, the only planet of my light,
Light of my life, and life of my desire,
Chief good whereto my hope doth only aspire,
World of my wealth, and heaven of my delight.

Nothing may invigorate the weak man like beauty; even as, contrariwise, the strong man may be shorn of his strength by it.

Since beauty is so potent an influence upon those who may be called the bone and gristle of mankind, no one can deny that it is worth possessing, even apart from the intrinsic pleasure that the possessor derives from it. The lot of the beautiful woman who is not a victim to inordinate

vanity, is probably the happiest in life. She has all the celebrity attained at infinite cost by men of action; and she has also the sweet assurance that, unlike many men of distinction, she wins hearts by intimacy, even as she wins reputation at the hands of Fame. And this, too, in the days of her youth, at a time of life when men are but beginning the battle for renown which they so seldom win until they are grey-headed!

But the reverse of the picture ought not to be overlooked. I mean the case of a woman, whose conceit is as inordinate as her beauty. She is as much to be pitied as her sister is to be envied. The world is always ready to accept the disposition of the beautiful woman as a necessary and inevitable part of her. If she be modest and considerate of others, she is angelic; and though scandal may whisper lies about her, she remains angelic in the hearts of her admirers. But if she be vain, the world straightway jumps to the conclusion that she has all the other failings and vices which have immediate or collateral connection with that very fatal characteristic. "Give her compliments, my dear fellow, as you give a child sugar-plums—and she'll take them as greedily. She's a pretty creature, and she will go all lengths; such women always do." Such is the standard criticism of the world upon her. And when once it is passed there is no disputing it. For in the first place, it is never passed without substantial reason; and, in the second place, after sentence, it were a herculean task even to assume to be other than as vain as the world judges her.

Whether married or single, the vain woman is doomed to find her beauty anything rather than a blessing. She does not conciliate her own sex, and she piques and goads mankind into an unsatisfactory state of adoration, which never endures long. Her victims all withdraw from her sooner or later, and they do not look back upon their servitude with any pleasure. And it is often her melancholy fate, after a while, to find herself still the possessor of as much beauty as ever she had, but with never a suitor. The men are ready enough to smile and jest with her; but they know her too well to care to go farther. And, in the end, she has actually to lure and scheme for a husband with as much tedious assiduity as if she were both ugly and past the thirties. The married life that follows need not be analysed. It is a terrible satire on what is called "connubial felicity."

In conclusion, perhaps it may be asked of me to define this "beauty" which is so responsible, and yet, on the whole, so desirable an endowment. But I am glad to be able to evade the task. How would you define a rose? Would you call it a red or white flower at the end of a stalk, generally among leaves, often with thorns round it, and nearly always having a sweet smell? I do not see how you could say more, keeping strictly to the definition. And yet, is this an acceptable description of a rose? To me it seems hardly even to picture it, and not at all to convey an idea of the imperceptible attributes which are partly of the rose and partly subjective in the person who looks at the rose.

It is the same with beauty, only in a much stronger degree. Fancy cataloguing the charms of a beautiful woman! That was the old fashion; and I hope it was found good enough by our worthy forefathers. But though a dim conception of beauty may be obtained through a string of terms like "a cherry lip," "teeth of pearls," "a nose and chin of pure ivory," "pretty little ears of coral," "swan-like neck," "Lilliputian hands and feet," and the other conventional phrases of eulogy, the beauty herself thus portrayed is at the best wholly inanimate. She does not even command as much admiration as a Greek statue.

And, again, to substitute an abstract definition for one made up of genuine human details, try if this of Edmund Burke's be any more consoling to the fancy:

"The qualities of beauty, as they are merely sensible qualities, are the following: First, to be comparatively small. Second, to be smooth. Third, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but Fourth, to have those parts not angular, but melted, as it were, into each other. Fifth, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of strength. Sixth, to have its colours clear and bright, but not very strong and glaring. Seventh, or if it should have any glaring colour, to have it diversified with others."

This has very little effect upon the mind of a man. I hope Burke never knew the candid opinion of a woman about the definition.

Is beauty then indefinable? Surely, if by definition be meant such a portraiture as shall seem good to you and me and all the world. The woman I call beautiful may not please you; and I may be rude enough to ridicule your choice. And it is

well that this is so. Otherwise, the globe would never have to face the possibility of that over-population, the thought of which gave Malthus the nightmare.

THE CINQUE PORTS.

ENGLAND has changed, physically, since the Norman Conquest. Dunwich is almost gone; half-a-dozen East Yorkshire villages, named and entered in Henry the Eighth's "Liber Regis," are quite gone. There has been compensation, too, such as it is, both in the Lancashire sands, and in the mud at the Wash. But the greatest changes, physical and social, have been in the south-east of Kent. In Roman days, and for some time after, Thanet was cut off by a wide estuary, *Portus Rutupinus*, by the Saxons called *Wantsum*, with *Rutupiæ* (*Richborough*) at its south entrance, *Regulbium* (*Reculver*), or *Rutupiæ alteræ*, at its northern entrance. Despite gradual shrinking, it was for centuries the regular waterway from France to London. Ships thus escaped the chance of head winds round the Foreland. When *Richborough* got high and dry, and its water became a marsh, *Sandwich* was founded further out on the accumulating sands. But the *Stour*, driven north by the "Eastward Drift," now trickles through a dreary waste, which was once the famous *Sandwich bay*, and joins the sea under *Thanet cliffs*, close by the little *Bay of Pegwell*. *Romney* lost its harbour chiefly from a different cause: the "inning" of the marshes. Before Roman times, *Romney Marsh*, still in many parts ten feet below medium high-water mark, was a shallow sea, bounded on the north by the low cliff line from *Shorncliff* to *Hythe* and *Lymne*, on the east by the growing shingle deposit of the "Eastward Drift," unchecked by *Dungeness*, which had not yet begun to grow out seaward. Who reclaimed the whole triangle of twenty-two thousand acres by building what is called the *Rhee wall*, from the south-western corner of the shingle bank right up to *Appledore*, no one knows. It may have been the *Belgæ*, who were very fairly civilised; if it was the Romans they did it early, for the soil is full of Roman remains of every date. Clearly, it was all done at once; there is no trace of intermediate works. The shingle bank was strengthened into what is now *Dymchurch wall*; and the *Rhee bank*, with a channel which turned aside

most of the water of the Lymne, completed the work.

For a time the "inning" of Romney Marsh improved Romney Harbour and the whole Rother estuary; but two causes led to its being silted up, and to Rye and Winchelsea being ruined as seaports, while Romney was compelled to shift seaward and become New Romney. Of these one was the lessening outflow of the rivers, due—they say—to the cutting down of the great Andrede's wood (the Weald); the other, the growth of Dungeness (calculated at from seven to twenty feet per year), which blocked Romney Harbour against the tides and so stopped the "scouring" which had kept it from being choked up. As late as the fourteenth century, Rye was on a hill in a fair tidal harbour, and Winchelsea was only too accessible from the sea, as is proved by its frequent captures by the French. Before this, Denge Marsh—on Dungeness, near Lydd—had been "inoned," and so had Walland and other marshes south of the Rhee wall; all the district belonging to Canterbury (given by Offa), and the "innings" being the work of successive Archbishops. Guildeford Marsh, however, remained water; and Oxney, between the branches of the Rother, was still an island; indeed, in the great inundation of 1287, which helped to form the Zuyder Zee, Winchelsea, with its eighteen churches, was destroyed, and for a time Rye got deep water.

Winchelsea—the name, interpreted, in a queer mixture of British and Saxon, as Gwent-chesil-ey (level shingle isle)—reminds us of the Chesil Bank, which joins Portland Isle to the Dorset coast, and which is made of pebbles gradually lessening in size as it runs farther out, so that a practised smuggler could, in the darkest night, tell exactly where he had beached his boat by "pesing" (weighing in his hand) a few of the stones.

All these shingle deposits are due to the same cause—the uniform action of wind and tide sweeping along vast masses of sand and shingle; the speed growing as the channel narrows. For three-quarters of the year the prevailing winds are south-west, and they are helped by the flood tide, which, thanks to the Atlantic tidal-wave, is stronger than the ebb. Stones and sand, therefore, are driven eastward, the latter going farthest, the smaller stones being, as a rule, carried further than the big ones. The shingle beaches are thrown up directly by this two-fold action; the sand-banks—

Goodwin Sands, the shoal that fills Sandwich Harbour, the Dogger Bank, and the Dutch and Belgian sands—are formed where the meeting of tides or currents causes dead-water.

This "eastward drift" has ruined "our English Hansa," as the Cinque Ports have been called, almost as completely as like causes have killed "the dead cities of the Zuyder Zee," and a number of towns along the coast of Provence. Not one has escaped.

Hastings thrives, but not as a port; the first Hastings is under the sea: you can trace it at low water by the rocks which mark the old shore line. When the sea broke in, the shingle followed, the little rivers were choked, and a pebble beach formed, which is the foundation of the parades and terraces. One can measure the extent of these unrecorded changes by noting that an island, a mile and a half long, which in Norden's map, two centuries ago, fronts St. Leonard's, is gone, though no record has been kept of its disappearance.

Dover holds its own, thanks to unlimited expenditure; "its own" being nothing but a winding creek. It has more Roman remains than any of its sister ports: the basement of one "pharos" still stands on the cliff; so did a fragment of the other—the Bredenstone—till it was swept away the other day for some new fortifications. Its name is British. "Dwr," is the little river. Did you never, when walking in Wales, get a drink of "dwr glan" (clear water) at a cottage, and mark, if you were classical, that "dwr" and the Greek name for water are sister words?

The Jutes, though they shifted the sites of several of the Roman stations—giving up Lymne, for instance, with its Castle of Stutfall, for Hythe—took Dubris just as the last "Count of the Saxon shore" (Roman Admiral defending the south-east coast) had left it.

In Domesday, Godwin's favourite town is said to owe the King twenty ships, each with twenty men, for fifteen days a year. The passage fee for a King's messenger to France was threepence for a horse in winter, twopence in summer, the burgesses finding a pilot and assistant; if more help was wanted it must be paid for.

Foreigners had by no means such good terms. Erasmus (1497) complains bitterly of extortion, and says some Antwerp men, who once took him across, were almost as bad as the English. "As an ape is always an ape, so a sailor is always a sailor," is his verdict; "they steal your baggage, aye,

filch your purse when they get the chance." In his day the fare was still the same; "half a drachma," he calls it.

Hastings—not Roman at all (for Pevensey is the Roman Anderida, with fine remains still of its old castle)—has more of a history than Dover. Hastings the pirate is a myth; the name is from the Haestingas, a South Saxon clan, conquered with the rest of the South Saxon land by Offa of Mercia. He gave the "gens Haestingorum" to the Abbey of Saint Denis; and, by-and-by, Æthelstan set up a Royal mint, and collectors can show a whole series of Hastings coins. After the Conquest, Hastings rose to be premier port among the five. Its "barons" took precedence at coronations; its name came first in writs and charters; William built its castle, and gave it to the Count of Eu, on the opposite coast. A necessity of his existence was to keep open communication with the Continent. Hence, a port that just fronted his own Normandy suited him better than Dover. But William could no more stop the sea than Canute could; it washed away the old town, and in Henry the Second's reign Hastings was let off with eighteen ships, Rye and Winchelsea being ordered to make up its quota with an extra ship apiece. A hundred years later it was rated at six, and then sank to five, at which it stood through the rest of the Cinque Port history.

A falling-off this, from the palmy days of the Third Crusade, when, in 1147, Hastings took the lead of the Cinque Port ships, and of Robert Earl of Gloucester's "sea calves" from Southampton, and when a Hastings priest was chosen Bishop of Lisbon as soon as the expedition had wrested that city from the Moors!

There is nothing ancient in Hastings, except the few mouldering castle walls—nothing like the remains at Dover; or the "Wiper's tower" at Rye, built by Stephen's Captain of mercenaries, William of Yprès; or the grand Romanesque churches at Hythe and Romney.

Of all these towns, Sandwich is the quaintest. Its church is fine, with the finest towers in Kent; it has some fine flamboyant windows, and curious clock, with huge pendulum reaching down to the floor. And many of its houses have such an old-fashioned Dutch look. Many, alas, have lately been pulled down. When I was last there a broker's shop was full of blue and white tiles, the fruit of one of these wholesale demolitions.

For a long time Stonor, now a small village, rivalled Sandwich; and both were London's main ports, Stonor being in the tenth century called Londonwick. Both suffered from the Danes, and both were granted to Canterbury—Stonor by Cnut, to Saint Augustine's; Sandwich by Ethelred, to Christ Church.

Richborough is perhaps the finest Roman castle in England; and certainly its position, amid marshes and slow streams where the sail of a lighter comes upon you quite unexpectedly, is not devoid of poetry. But the silt killed Richborough; and though the "Walloon" (Dutch) gave new life to Sandwich, Richborough's successor, the improvement was only temporary. The colony strove hard, by its baize manufacture, to bring back prosperity to the decaying place. In 1565 the houses, which had sunk to two hundred, had more than doubled, a third being built by refugees. Seven years later Elizabeth visited the town, chiefly to arrange about these Dutch settlers. Poor creatures! they had come for liberty, and found strict rule. "They shall have their children baptized according to the order now used here under pain of banishment," says the edict. And their morals were looked after with equal severity. In 1584, "eight notorious drunken Flemings" were banished. As the Queen went through, scaffolds were set up in the streets, hung with black and white baize, and children placed thereon spinning yarn. But baize-making would not scour out the harbour. Richard the Third, who did more good than he gets credit for, had tried and failed. Henry the Eighth promised, and did not perform. Most tantalising of all must have been Protector Somerset's characteristic reply, in the name of poor little Edward: "The Sandwich burgeses have our full liberty to use for their harbour all the proceeds of selling the church furniture in their three parishes." One thinks of the man in Molière's comedy who, when the knavish valet tells him his son is held to ransom by Turks, says: "You know the big trunk up in the cock-loft? Go and take all the old clothes out of it; sell them to the marine-store men, and ransom him with the money."

In Elizabeth's time the silting up got worse, and a deal of extra anti-Popery feeling was roused, thanks to a big Spanish galleon belonging to Pope Paul the Fourth, which ran aground, and could not be got off. Perhaps it was owing to the shallowness of their harbours that the Cinque Port

ships, like the Channel steamers nowadays, were always small. When Richard the First wanted big ships for the voyage to the Holy Land, he got nearly all his fleet from the coast of Anjou, from Southampton, and from the western ports. From the Bayeux tapestry, and from twelfth and thirteenth century seals, we see that the Cinque Port ships were only half-decked boats of from twenty to fifty tons. A fishing-boat, in fact, was turned into a "gent de guerre" (man of war) by rigging up a fore and aft "castle:" a square open box, that is, to shelter the crossbow men. There were no rudders, the steering being managed with two oars worked over the quarter. And, there being neither chart nor compass, we need not wonder that wholesale wrecks were the rule in these shoaly seas. With the fourteenth century the bigger merchant ships began to be used for war. These had a second mast, a long stem answering for bowsprit, and a rudder; but the Cinque Ports kept to the smaller craft, of which, during John's fever of nautical enterprise, the "Premier Port" (Hastings) furnished six, the "two ancient towns," Winchelsea ten, Rye five; while of the "Eastern Ports" Dover supplied twenty-one, and Romney, Hythe, and Sandwich, only five apiece.

The strength of the Dutch element in Sandwich is curiously shown in 1605. Sir W. Monson, who had been driving away some Dutch ships, writes: "Thousands, beholding me from the shore, cursed both me and His Majesty's ships. And no marvel; for most of the inhabitants are either born, bred, or descended from Holland."

Their mark is still seen in the excellent gardening—early broccoli in such cold, low-lying land, for instance. Whether or not they have anything to do with the seed-growing, which is one of the great industries of Romney Marsh, I know not. The seed-harvest is one of the things to be seen, if you are there in the season. So also are Dymchurch wall, which is always "en évidence," and Hubert de Burgh's "Maison Dieu," at Dover. This "Maison Dieu," restored not long ago, was founded by Shakespeare's "Gentle Hubert," as a place where poor soldiers returning from foreign service might have a fortnight's free quarters.

Dover Harbour, by the way, dates from Henry the Eighth. The old harbour was blocked up by the fall of a huge mass of cliffs. Henry built a pier with two round

towers at the ends; yet Dover decayed rapidly; and the spirit which burst out when the Armada came was but an expiring flash.

New Romney had fallen so low that, when Leland "walked" there in Henry the Eighth's time, he reported: "It hath been a netely good haven, insomuch that within men's remembrance ships have come hard up to the town, and cast anchors in one of the churchyards. The sea is now two miles from the town, so sore thereby decayed that, where there were three great parishes and churches, is now scarce one well maintained." Add to this the perpetual expense of keeping open sluices and repairing sea walls, and it is no wonder that in the last century the population sank to five hundred. Thanks to the marsh cattle-fair, it has now again risen to one thousand two hundred. Romney was a great place for the old mystery plays; the Lydd records contain lists of the cost of dresses, scenery, the scribe's labour, and other curious particulars.

Hythe has come out best from the loss of its harbour, because the loss was total. For over two hundred years it has been given up as hopeless; grass has grown on silt and shingle, and the beach has been used for more than thirty years for the Hythe Musketry School. Rye received a large French contingent, chiefly fugitives after Saint Bartholomew's massacre. They were as numerous as the Dutch at Sandwich; and Queen Elizabeth, who called the place "Rye Royal," gave its fishermen the exclusive right of supplying her table. The French strain showed itself all through the long war in systematic smuggling. Of all the ports Winchelsea suffered most from foreign attacks. Founded at first on a sandbank, it was half ruined in 1250, losing three hundred houses. The like happened in 1284; yet the town, undismayed, bearded Prince Edward, holding out desperately for Simon de Montfort. The place was stormed, with great slaughter, for the inhabitants had put back after determining to sail away to France, and having got on shipboard, with wives and children, landing and burning Portsmouth on their way. Edward moved them uphill to the present site of the town, of which he superintended the building, and one day nearly lost his life; his horse "shying" at a windmill, and leaping over the cliff. New Winchelsea was only just finished in time; in 1287, the half-ruined old town was entirely swept away. But

the new one throve no better; the sea, whose advance had ruined its predecessor, ruined it by retreating from its harbour. It pined; and when Elizabeth saw its Mayor and "Barons" (or "jurats") in scarlet robes, like Aldermen, with nothing to lord over but a heap of ruined houses, in her tart way she nicknamed it "Little London."

The chief glory of the Cinque Ports is their connection with the two mediæval Trafalgars of 1216 and 1293. The first was the "battle of the Straits," that is, Hubert de Burgh's victory over Eustace, "the Monk," who, with the help of the Barons, had seized London, taken Hastings, and overrun Kent. John was saved by his fleet, as Charles the First might have been, and James the Second also, had they had a De Burgh or a De Albini to fight for them.

Eustace's first fleet was lost in a storm. The French Queen and Arthur's mother managed to fit him out with another, on board of which was a French army, packed like herrings, under Robert de Courtenay. This was the ruin of the armament.

Hubert, with the Cinque Port fleet, sallied out as Drake did, nearly four centuries later, and, instead of crossing the Frenchman's bows, "luffed" till they were well astern, and then, with the whole force of the wind, bore down on the unprepared enemy. Only fifteen ships escaped; Eustace was at once beheaded as a pirate; many French knights, maddened with the quicklime thrown by the English, leaped overboard. All Dover was looking on; and a grand procession of Bishops and Clergy, who, being "King's men," had taken refuge there since the Barons held the open country, went down to meet the victors.

Before 1293, feelings were much embittered on both sides. French and English could fight and be friends. When Prince Louis heard of the battle of the Straits, he at once made peace and left England. But between Gascons and Normans the case was different: the latter looked on the former as traitors, and, when they took a Gascon ship, would hang the sailors to their yard-arms, hanging a dog between each pair, and sailing in that guise past the Cinque Ports.

Another time, eighty Norman vessels, passing themselves off in the Gironde as wine-ships, began plundering the unsuspecting English, and then attacked the Bayonne and Irish fleet, capturing seventy.

England and France were at peace just then, so the Cinque Ports took the matter into their own hands, challenged the Normans, and, with a fleet of two hundred—Irish, Dutch, and Gascon among them—all with streamers flying, to signify death without quarter, sailed over to St. Mahé, in Brittany, and there, helped by a furious gale, which gave scope for their seamanship, almost annihilated their opponents.

Edward was alarmed at this outbreak in time of peace; but Philip's treachery in seizing the Gascon towns gave him no time to enquire into the matter.

Thirty years after, the Cinque Ports took part in the victory of Sluys, won by placing ships full of archers among those containing knights and heavy armed. It was a great victory; but immediately after it the French ravaged the Kentish sea-board, just as, in 1360, when we should have thought France hopelessly weakened, she swooped down on Winchelsea, sacked and burnt it, and repeated the compliment the very same day next year.

Ten years earlier had been fought the battle of "Lespagnols-sur-mer," off Winchelsea, so well described by Froissart. We can see the little English ships bowling along before the wind against the huge Biscayans; Sir John Chandos singing the last new German "Minnelied," as the minstrels played in the fore-castle; little ten-year-old John of Gaunt listening. He had refused to stay ashore with his mother, though when the battle was won he was in haste to land and ride off with the rest, to show her that her husband and sons were all safe.

Winchelsea was now in her brief prime; the Alards, her chief family, were famous men. Gervase Alard was the first English Admiral of the Fleet. In 1380, the town was once more taken by the French, and so thoroughly ruined, that it never recovered. Not even the capture of the great fleet, fitted out by Charles the Sixth to conquer England—having on board a wooden wall, with lofty towers, all stowed away in pieces ready to be set up as a defence the moment the troops landed, and carrying such a stock of wine that it supplied the English market for two years—could give life to ruined Winchelsea. It was burned once more in 1448, but that was during the War of the Roses. The Cinque Ports were strongly Yorkist; nay, they went so far as to side with Jack Cade, to whose army Hastings furnished a dozen men, while Lydd sent him a porpoise.

There is little else to notice, save the age-long rivalry between the Ports and Yarmouth. Tradition says that Cinque Port fishermen founded the place on a sandbank at the mouth of the Yare—a sort of no-man's land, where they dried their nets, and held a yearly fair. By-and-by, when their huts had grown into a town, and the town had got a charter, the feud began, and at times was deadly—as in 1297, when at the Swyn, while the King's troops were landing, and under his very eyes, the Cinque Port crews fell on the Yarmouth men, burnt more than twenty of their ships, killing the crews,* only three ships—in one of which, says Walter of Henningburg, was the King's treasure—escaping out to sea. The strangest thing is, that the Ports' men were never punished. Edward published the "Dite" (Edict), by which the East Anglian rights were recognised; but quarrels still went on till Elizabeth's time, when, till 1663, when the fair finally ceased, the Ports' men's "Barons" had a great banquet given them by the Yarmouth "Baillifs."

A better country for a walking or cycling trip than the line of Cinque Port coast it would be hard to find. Every mile gives some object of interest—old castles, like Saltwood, whence the Archbishops overlooked their subject towns; traces of old harbours, where our navy was nursed through its babyhood; fine churches; Roman antiquities. If you go, enquire at Faversham for Harry Pay, whom the Spaniards called "the pirate Arripay." In 1407, at the head of the Ports' fleet, he took, at one swoop, no less than one hundred and twenty of their merchant ships.

SOME FORMS OF WIT.

Is the Pun a legitimate form of wit? Some people think not; and Dr. Johnson said that a man who would make a pun would pick a pocket. But the fact is, that the general objection to puns is because of their frequent lack of wit—that is to say, it is directed to bad puns. We do not want to discuss bad puns—or even to hear them. The point is, whether good puns are admissible as legitimate and commendable expressions of humour. It is of no use to say, like Sydney Smith, that puns

* They were not always so successful; in 1356, they went west to attack the Cornish fishers, who would not lower their flag in passing; but the Fowey men—thence called "Fowey gallants"—fell on them and beat them back.

ought to be in bad repute, and, therefore, they are. As a matter of fact, they are not in bad repute, and although one finds an incorrigible punster—often, it is true, an incorrigible bore—in every little circle of social life, one does not find the race of pickpockets to be increasing alarmingly in numbers. Nor do the statistics of Crime seem to bear any relation to the productions of Planché, of Brough, or of Gilbert, to the spread of burlesque, and the cultivation of Bab-balladist opera.

It is probable that there are few, even in these days of culture, capable of appreciating the profound witticism which De Quincey discovered in the jests for which poor Aelius Lamia was put to death by Domitian; but, on the other hand, the time will probably never come when Porson's pun will not serve to show that, even in gerund-grinding, there may be fun:

When Dido saw Æneas would not come,
She mourned in silence and was Di-do-dum.

Cicero had the reputation of being a great punster, although not many of his witticisms have come down to us. There is one, however, that may be appreciated even without a knowledge of Latin. Once, a Jew attempted to get the cause of Verres into his own hands, and Cicero, who believed the Jew to be a mere tool of the culprit's, opposed him by asking: "What hath a Jew to do with swine's flesh?" The Romans called a boar "verres," so the point was neat and appropriate.

If we want to argue the legitimacy of puns, we are obliged to fall back on the old discussion as to the difference between Wit and Humour. The definitions are legion, of course; but not one of them is wholly satisfactory. "Knowledge comes and wisdom lingers," Tennyson says, and perhaps we might found upon this a parody, with some approach to truth—that wit sparkles and humour permeates. But there is little profit to be got in analyses of this kind. What is funny is not necessarily witty; but what is funny must have in it, or suggested by it, some of the essence of humour. Thus, Charles Lamb was not so far wrong when he said that the most far-fetched and startling puns are the best.

The familiar enquiry, "Is it true that the first apple was eaten by the first pair?" is far-fetched; but one cannot deny the humour of it. Again, in the conundrum, "Why is blindman's buff like sympathy?"—"Because it is a fellow feeling for a fellow-creature," there is a direct application which

is also unquestionably humorous. Then, as another example of a pun which is absurdly apparent, there was Douglas Jerrold's remark about a man to whom he had repeatedly written, in vain, for some money.

"I have written him," said Jerrold to an acquaintance, "but got nothing."

"Strange," said the other, "for he is a man full of kindness."

"Yes," rejoined Jerrold, "un-remitting kindness."

A pun which requires explanation in brackets is indeed simply intolerable. The Oxford scholar who, meeting a porter carrying a hare through the streets, asked: "Prithee, friend, is that thy own hare, or a wig?" required no commentator. Nor did Tom Hood, who, when all is said and done, remains the Prince of British punsters. He puns as naturally as he laughs—a babe can see the point of his jokes, and the crustiest Dry-as-dust cannot resist them. It needs no parenthetical aid to evolve the chuckle over Sally Brown's jilted awain, whose

Death, which happened in his berth, at forty odd befall;

They went and told the Sexton, and the Sexton tolled the bell.

Or at Ben Battle, who, at duty's call, left his legs in Badajos's breaches, and who was rejected by faithless Nelly Gray because he couldn't wear his shoes upon his feat of arms. More subtle and more polished is the humour of "To Minerva," one verse of which is inimitable:

My brain is dull, my sight is foul,
I cannot think on what I've read.
Then, Pallas, take away thine owl,
And let us have a lark instead.

Theodore Hook is thought by many to be equal to Hood as a punster; but Hook was laboured and slow in comparison. There is an impromptu air about Hood's puns which is incomparable, and an unexpectedness, even when you are looking for them, that is delicious. Frederick Locker once or twice seemed to have Hood's unconscious ease; as thus:

He cannot be complete in aught,
Who is not humorously prone;
A man without a merry thought,
Can hardly have a funny bone.

John Hill Burton relates a legal joke which, to the legal mind, has all the charm of a pun. One day a bailiff, serving a writ, had been compelled by the defendant to swallow the document. In a state of great agitation and anger, the officer rushed into the court, over which Lord Norbury

was presiding, to complain of the indignity. He was met by the expression of his Lordship's hope that the writ was "not returnable in this court."

Perhaps the non-professional wits—the natural and spontaneous punsters—often say the best things; but then there is not always somebody at hand with the readiness to note the good things and preserve them. In its way, there is nothing better than the answer given by a Cambridge student who, walking with a visitor, was asked, as the Master of Saint John's passed on horseback, "Who is that?" "That is Saint John's head on a charger." Nothing better? Well, yes, we must admit that Napier's despatch, when he had taken Scinde—"Peccavi" (I have sinned)—cannot be beaten; although General de Bourmont's message to the French Minister of War, when the Dey of Algiers escaped him, was nearly as good: "Perdidi Diem" (I have lost a Day). Nero, the Roman Emperor, is said to have perpetrated a practical pun. He made Seneca's name condemn him—"Se neca" (kill thyself). The unhappy victim had to commit suicide in order to complete the perfection of the joke. The fun of this strikes one as like that of the boys with the frogs.

There is a very problematic pun ascribed to Sir Francis Drake, who, when he saw the Spanish Fleet spread their sails in flight, is said to have sent to Elizabeth the single word "Cantharides," which, as everybody knows, is "the Spanish fly." But Drake was not a likely man to make a pun at any time, and still less likely to invent so elaborate and yet so simple a one at such a moment.

Bret Harte, by the way, is not usually regarded as a professional wit, and yet among the good things which cling to one's memory is the couplet in the "Heathen Chinese":

Concealed in his nails, which were taper,
What is common in tapers—that's wax.

Somebody has written a parody, in which a candidate for examination even beats the record of the Mongolian:

Concealed in his palms, which were spacious,
What is common in palms—and that's dates.

Speaking of palms recalls the famous pun of the Bishop of Oxford, who, when asked by a lady, why he was nicknamed "Soapy Sam," replied: "Because, madam, I am always getting into hot water, and always coming out with clean hands."

Perhaps, it may be said that some of these examples are not true puns. But a pun

is not necessarily a twisting of spelling, and a contortion of syllables, as the writers of burlesques and "Comic" papers seem to think. It is a play upon words, and to be really entitled to be considered witty, should play both upon the sound and the sense, if possible, but at any rate more upon the sense than the sound. Horace Walpole once said, that the finest pun ever perpetrated was by the Irishman who complained that he had been changed at nurse. So we would say that one of the finest examples of the pun, as a mere play upon sound, was furnished by the man who inscribed a box of tea with the legend "Tu docet" (Thou teachest). Could such a man pick a pocket? It is impossible. But the fact is, that while the puns of the Wit are among the joys of life, the puns of the confirmed punster almost lend an attraction to death.

In conclusion, let us note that the word pun is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "punian," to toss, or throw about. It is this idea which is so finely expressed by Tennyson, when he tells of how Earl Limours when entertaining Geraint, a knight of Arthur's Court, at his table:

Took the word and played upon it,
And made it of two colours; for his talk,
When wine and free companions kindled him,
Was went to glance and sparkle like a gem
Of fifty facets.

CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

A SERIAL STORY.

By "RITA."

Author of "Danie Durden," "Darby and Joan,"
"My Lord Concess," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE QUEER EXPERIENCES.

IF living with Mrs. Cray was a "liberal education," I wonder what I ought to call my experience of Dr. Carneggie.

He was the strangest being I ever came across, and I suppose the cleverest. He lived in a queer, rambling house some miles distant from Launceston—a dreary, weird-looking place, for all the world like the picture of a haunted house in the Christmas numbers of the magazines. He had a surgery, and a laboratory, and Heaven knows what all, and almost all his time was spent in what he called "scientific experiments." He kept an old manservant, as queer as, but infinitely more uncouth than, himself. He was a Cornish man, by name of Zeal. Whether that was surname or Christian, I never could make out.

As far as I could judge, the doctor hadn't many patients, nor a very extensive practice. When I had been there about a month, he one day told me to go out in the queer old covered chaise he had, and call on several of them and report the cases to him. I thought it was a very odd thing to do, but I took the list, and set off accordingly.

The first patient I had to see was a Miss Crabapple, an old maid, who lived with a sister, older than herself, at a place called The Wyke, and who was suffering from chronic dyspepsia. I explained to them that my master was unwell, and not able to come out, but being anxious to know how they were—or, rather, how Miss Penelope was—had sent me.

They seemed to think it quite a natural thing to do, so I was soon at ease, and took down all the invalid's symptoms and complaints in a little note-book that Dr. Carneggie had given me. The two old ladies tried to pump me a good deal about my master; but I was careful to know nothing, and I believe they put me down as an enormously stupid person.

The younger Miss Crabapple was a very religious person, and put many strange questions to me about the welfare of my soul, and where I expected to go, and if I lived my life in this world as preparation for another.

I can't say I found that visit very pleasant, and I wondered if she talked like that to the doctor.

I have often wondered why people who have "got religion"—as they express it—are so extremely unpleasant towards those who have not, or who they think have not.

But to return to my patients. After leaving the Miss Crabapples, I had to see one or two farmers' wives and report of them. Then I drove home by the wild, moorland road, thinking what a queer world this is, and how strangely the pattern of human life has varied since the first man and woman accepted their birthright.

When I had had my tea, the doctor sent for me into his study, where he generally sat of an evening with his dog for company. By the way, that dog certainly deserves a description. It was a small, white, silky-haired creature, with the very oddest and most uncanny face I ever saw on an animal. The eyes were enough to haunt one. So big, so soft, so pathetic, and with such a look in them as if she were longing to tell you something, and almost breaking her

heart because you could not understand her.

The doctor called her "Shame;" if one ever heard such a name for a dog! He had the queerest ideas about her. He told me she had a human soul imprisoned in her because of the evil that soul had done in some previous existence. And he also said he was going to find out what the evil was, and who she had been; and I solemnly declare that, when he said it, that dog hung its head and crept away under the couch to hide itself, for all the world as if it knew, and were ashamed of what he might discover.

But this is nothing to the way he used to talk, sometimes making my very blood run cold with terror, and yet it was so interesting and so extraordinary that I could not help listening again and again.

He gave me very different ideas of life and death, I must say. Indeed, death, according to him, was a word without meaning, for he would prove that nothing could die—that is to say, cease to exist; that new forms and new life were ceaselessly springing from the decay we perceived with our earth senses, and that every one and everything lived again, and again, and again, in some shape or other.

"There is an inner world," he would say, "where nature keeps her stores. They are far more wonderful and varied than those which she supplies for more material regions. Could man, as he is now, pierce the veil which separates his world from that other, he would perceive the cause of all things, the beginning of all things, the effect of all things. He would learn, too, that he has to hold himself responsible for his thoughts and actions, and that they and their consequences do not end upon the earth plane he inhabits, but extend into the regions of that other world, and imprint there their ineffaceable records. Nay, more than that—they affected the currents passing ever to and fro in those astral regions, and acted for the welfare or detriment of others to an extent that was almost infinite."

But when he would go on to say that all those impure and wicked thoughts became "beings" in that inner world, as he called it, monsters of evil who peopled space with shapes as hideous and debasing as we picture devils, I grew fairly terrified.

Of course I could not understand half he said, but he liked to have me to listen; and sometimes he would come into the kitchen and talk away to old Zeal and

myself by the hour, and quote Paracelsus, and Hellenbach, and Leibnitz, and other extraordinary men who seemed to me able to prove that everything was nothing, and nothing was everything, and that "I" was not "I," but only thought so; and that the earth wasn't a bit like what it looked, because we thought it looked as it was; whereas the other people in that "inner world" saw it quite differently. That humanity had created its own demons by force of its own tendency to evil; and these demons fastened on it, and preyed upon it, and made it viler and viler, according to the increase of thought that peopled space so recklessly.

I am simply putting this down as I wrote it at the time. No doubt wiser heads than mine can understand what it all means. I am afraid I shall have to be "evoluted" a good many more times before my nature and mind will be capable of taking it in.

He would talk about renunciation till it seemed quite an easy thing, as well as a noble one; of pain that was almost pleasure, strained to one point of endurance; of pleasure that was absolute pain, viewed from another; of a life that seemed objectless, heartless, alone in all, yet living for all in a wider and greater sense than most men comprehend.

But sometimes he would have wild, fierce moods, that terrified me; and then only old Zeal could manage him. And I used to wonder if there was not some dark secret in his life—something that had turned him into the morose, eccentric being he had become.

He seldom spoke well of women, and I often wondered why he had engaged me; but I suppose he had his reasons.

Now and then I heard from Miss Kate. She was going abroad for the winter, she told me; somewhere on the south coast of France. She never mentioned Mr. Tresyllion's name, or in any way alluded to that stormy scene when she had given herself up to "memory," as she said, for the last time.

In this quiet place, so far removed from the noise and life of the great world, I heard nothing and learnt nothing of the people whose names had been so familiar to me at Mrs. Cray's. I often wondered about them, about her, about Mr. Tresyllion; but I was learning to take life quietly, and wait for events, and I know that if it was destined I should meet or see them again, I should surely do so.

I sometimes thought Dr. Carneggie could not really be quite right in his mind. Perhaps too much study had turned his brain. I shall never forget one night, when he told me that that queer little dog of his had been a girl some two hundred years before, and that he had loved her, and she had been false to him; and now, for her treachery and vileness, she was condemned to take a lower form; but for all that she had the same eyes and the same look; and now, by her fidelity and devotion, she might raise herself in the scale, and next time she came to earth would, in all probability, be a woman again.

Of course I used to listen to him quite gravely; but I often wondered whether an asylum wasn't the fittest place for him; and after Christmas I couldn't stand it any more, but left and went to London again. I didn't know where Miss Kate was; but I had saved enough money to keep me going till I found something else to do.

I went to Mrs. Jefferson's and told her the story of my last place; and she was as kind as ever, and said no doubt her husband would be able to get me a caretaker's place again; and in a week's time he did.

It was a queer little house, and stood in a side street leading out of one of the big West End Squares. It had been empty a long time, and, I heard afterwards, had the reputation of being haunted. But I never knew that, though I must say there were queer noises and sounds all over the place; but I put them down to rats, and slept none the worse for them. I used to work, and read, and write up my Confessions, as I called them, and altogether was very well contented to feel I was my own mistress again.

I had been several weeks in the house, and no one had ever come to look at it in spite of notice-boards and bills on the windows, when, one evening, just near dusk, I heard the bell ring. I went up to the front door, and there stood a small, queer little figure, a girl, as far as size, but with a woman's face, as I saw it in the gas-light—the oddest-looking person, and so queerly dressed!

Her voice was sharp, and had an odd twang about it that I couldn't make out; but as she soon told me she was an American, I put it down to that.

She wanted to see the house, so I took her over it, and she seemed delighted with the dark, odd shaped rooms and queer nooks and corners, and winding stairs, and I'm sure she talked enough for twenty people. I never heard such a chatterer in my life.

She had such an odd way, too, of peering about; and then she would say something and appear to listen for an answer, with her eyes upraised and her face pale and eager. Then she would turn to me and say:

"‘They’ think it will do," or "‘they’ say I had better take it," until at last I began to think she must be demented.

However, it was no business of mine. She had the agent's card, and started off to see him and settle the matter; and I wasn't sorry to see the last of her.

Next day she came again, and the agent with her; and then she told me it was settled. She was going to take the house, and wanted to come in at once. Of course there was the usual question: "Would I clean it and put it in order?" and I agreed to do so, and in a week's time it was quite straight, and the furniture settled.

Not that that was much to boast of. I think it was mostly second-hand, and bad at that.

The little woman—whose name, by the way, was Miss Annetta Justinia Potts—seemed very excited about her house; but I'm sure a drearier or more tasteless one it would have been hard to find. Dear me, how she used to flit about, for all the world like a restless little bird, and chatter till it made my head ache to listen to her!

I soon found out what she was—a spiritualist. A medium and clairvoyante, so she said, and a great personage in America on account of her psychic gifts. I wondered if she was so much thought of there that she hadn't stayed, because I didn't see what she was going to do in England. However, she told me she knew a great many people, and she sent out cards stating she would be "At Home" on certain evenings and afternoons for "séances" or consultations; and I was so curious and so interested about it all that I accepted her offer to stay on, and take care of the house and manage things generally, for she had no more notion of housekeeping than a baby, and none of her "spiritual" friends seemed able to teach her common-sense.

Sometimes, when she held a "séance," she used to let me stay in a tiny sort of room, curtained off from what she called her "receiving apartment," and I must say I was astonished at the things that went on, and more astonished, I think, at the gravity and attention of the sitters. Grave, old, bearded men would come and listen to those raps, and ask questions by the

alphabet, for all the world as if it were of life-and-death importance. Well, perhaps it was—to them. And there would be writing, and playing of musical instruments, and banging of furniture; and, really, I can't describe all that went on.

I suppose it was very wonderful. Only, I was stupid enough to always ask, "What was the good of it?"

They learnt nothing; they never seemed to get on any further. The answers were sometimes very silly, and sometimes all wrong; and it did not seem a very dignified thing for "spirits" to come back to this world for no higher purpose than playing tricks that any conjurer or clown could have done a million times better.

However, they seemed all very happy and delighted; and as for Miss Anatesta Justinia, she would go hopping about like a little draggetailed sparrow, and chirping away about "the dear speeruts," as she called them, or "our sweet friends," until I wonder they didn't all laugh at her.

However, there was one thing about the little woman that really was wonderful, and that was her "clairvoyant" faculties.

It was no sham or nonsense—she would just hold a person's hand, and then go off into a sort of trance, and presently begin to speak—not in her own voice, but quite a different one. And then she would tell them everything about themselves—their past, their present, even their future, if they wished.

She never remembered, herself, what she had said. Perhaps that was just as well; for once or twice when I was in the little room, unknown either to her or the sitter, I heard some very queer things indeed—things that I'm sure the enquirer never imagined any other person was aware of. However, I never betrayed any confidence, and I'm not going to relate any of them now, except that special one which seems to belong to the plot of this story, and that, I think, deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XIX. A CRUEL TRUTH.

It was quite dark one winter afternoon when I heard a ring at the bell, and, on answering it, found a lady standing at the door. She was wrapped in a long, fur-lined cloak that quite concealed her figure, and wore a thick, black veil.

"Is Miss Potts at home?" she asked, in a low, hurried voice.

"Yes, madam," I said. "Have you an appointment?"

"N—o," she said, "I came on chance. I—I have heard of her from a friend. If she is disengaged, perhaps she will see me?"

I said I would ask, and showed her into one of the queer little rooms that led out of the hall.

I could not think what it was about her that struck me as familiar—her voice, or her movements—but, despite her disguise, it seemed to me that I had seen her and known her before this afternoon.

Miss Anatesta, as she liked me to call her, said she would see the visitor, so I showed her into the usual "mystic chamber;" but, overpowered by a tormenting curiosity, I slipped into the little inner room which was curtained off from it, and which had a door of exit on to the kitchen stairs.

There was only one lamp burning on the table, and I saw Miss Anatesta rise and survey her visitor with her usual quick, bird-like glance.

"What is it you wish?" she said. "A séance, or to see me?"

"I heard," said the visitor, "that you are a clairvoyante. I—I am anxious to test your powers. I—I have a great wish to know something, and if you could tell me by means of your gift——"

"Why, certainly," said Miss Anatesta, cheerfully. "Nothing in the world easier. Sit down there"—she pointed to a low chair beside the couch—"and, if you've no objection, lift up your veil. I should like to see your eyes, that's all; and I must ask you to hold one of my hands. No, you needn't remove your glove. Ever seen this business before?"

"No," said the lady, in a low, nervous voice, as she raised the thick veil, and threw it back from her face.

I saw it then in the lamplight. I started, and almost cried out. It was Mrs. Cray. She was dressed in mourning; and she looked years older than when I had seen her last—sad, pale, careworn, anything but happy.

Meanwhile Miss Anatesta, after one of her sharp, quick glances, leant back on the cushions of the couch and began to yawn.

"I always begin like that," she said. "They send me to sleep, you know. I shan't be long this evening, I guess."

"They?" echoed Mrs. Cray, as if surprised.

"Yes—my friends—the spirits. I have two guides. One tells me the past, one the future. Which do you want to know?"

"Both," she said, eagerly.

"Well—you mustn't be frightened; for I can't wake up till they let me. So I'll tell you what to do. The first guide will speak to you through me. The second you must question. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said nervously.

"I'm—I'm going—off," said Miss Anatesta, with another prodigious yawn. "Mind, I shall know nothing of what is said to you. I never recollect when I'm out of trance. Oh—h—h—!"

Another yawn. Her head sank back; her eyes closed. I could see Mrs. Cray's face, white and anxious, watching that curious, little, wizened-up physiognomy. Then quite suddenly Miss Anatesta began to speak. The words ran on like a stream, without break or flaw, and were uttered in a voice quite unlike that of the clairvoyante herself.

"You were married ten years ago. You have no children. Your life has been changeful, erratic, marked by impulses that have swayed you and ruled you far too often. You were not happy in your married life. Your husband did not suit you. He was good, kind; but not sympathetic; not the nature to rule yours. You found this out very soon. Your life had other resources. I see Fame, of a kind. No; I should call it success. Success in some work or occupation you took up. It engrossed you for a time; but you wearied even of that. It is your nature to weary soon of things, as of people. You began to care for another man—to love him as you had never loved before——"

"True enough, Heaven knows!" sobbed the listener, as there came a pause in the flow of words.

"You loved him so passionately that you could not hide it from him; but he—did not love you."

Another pause. I saw how ghastly white her face turned; the quick clenching of the hand that had lain so quiet on her lap. But she said nothing.

"He pretended he did," the merciless voice went on; "but it was partly to save you humiliation and partly to drive away from his own heart and memory the passion he felt for another woman."

There was a silence, brief and portentous. Then came the low, fierce tones of jealousy and fear.

"Who—was that other woman?"

"I—I cannot tell you. I can see him and I can see you; but I cannot find her."

"Go on."

"Your husband died two months ago.

He never knew you had deceived him. Since you heard the news, you have been in hopes that your lover would marry you."

"Tell me for Heaven's sake, if you can, will he marry me?" she panted.

"It is of the future you ask now," came another voice, slow, sonorous, deep, and strangely impressive. "Beware; happy are those who know not, and live in hope and for sake of hope. Better fear and doubt than the certainty of misery foredoomed, and for which you will wait in anguish as the criminal for stroke of the executioner."

"No; I care not. I must know."

"He will not marry you," came the answer, calm and still, and given with an absolute conviction that carried its own weight even to the passionate, rebellious heart that refused to believe.

"Great Heaven!" came in one tortured gasp from the trembling creature's lips. She sank back on the chair, ghastly and trembling. I feared she was going to faint. "Oh, why did I ask—why?" she moaned, and snatched her hand from the "clairvoyante's" grasp, and wrung them wildly together. "But I don't believe it; I can't. He did love me. I know he did."

"You drugged his senses. You made him forget honour, and decency, and self-respect. You tempted and he—yielded; partly because he was a man; chiefly to save you some of the humiliation you merited. He has no regard for you now, only a great weariness, a little pity, and some contempt. He avoids you, does he not?"

"Yes," she muttered, hoarsely. "But I won him once. Surely my power is not quite gone? I can win him back again?"

"You never will," came the stern response. "Of all dead things none is so utterly dead as a passion born of caprice of the senses, loathed and wearied of for its ignoble bondage ere even its first kisses are cold. You have seen it, written it; you know it. Why, then, do you hope to hold this man now he is wearied and cold?"

"I love him," she moaned, as if speaking to herself out of her own misery. "Oh, Heaven! how I love him. More than honour, fame, and life. I have sacrificed so much for him; and now—now——"

"Now he is only proving one of the truths of life. All men are so. You wooed—and he—despised what was too easily won. Had you been wise——"

"Oh," she cried, passionately, "cease. As if one were ever that when one—loves!"

It seems absolute bathos, but, after

those wild words, that storm of grief and humiliation, came another string of—yawns. Miss Anatesta Justinia rubbed her eyes, opened them, received her fee for the interview, and I was summoned to show the veiled figure out of the front door.

She had not once looked at me. I suppose her mind was too full of misery to notice any one, or anything. But I did not envy her as she stepped out into the lighted street and stood for a moment there, looking about her in a blind and helpless way.

Then she hailed a cab, got in, and I heard her give the man the old familiar address in Bruton Street.

I shut the door and went back to my kitchen, and I must confess to feeling a great respect for Miss Anatesta's powers, since I had seen them so satisfactorily proved.

I can't, of course, explain how she did it; but I'm absolutely convinced there was no trick, or sham, about her clairvoyance.

It was a gift, or power of her own, and a very remarkable one. She knew nothing of Mrs. Cray; yet she had told her all this history as if she was reading it off a book.

I was astonished to hear that she was a widow, and I could well imagine what a raging curiosity to know the future at any cost must have brought her to Miss Anatesta. Poor thing! It would have been far better to have remained in ignorance than to suffer the agony she now did.

It seemed to me so foolish, so utterly senseless and irrational. It only shows what fools love can make of people; for, as I said before, Mrs. Cray was a clever woman and a highly-gifted woman, and yet, to think that she could sink to this!

For my part, I would suffer anything in the present sooner than lift the veil that hides the future. Surely, hope is a better gift than any power to see beyond the moment, however sad, however hard it is. I know my queer little mistress herself has often said to me: "Jane, for all that I might know and learn of what is in store for me, I will not ask. Let the future come to me as friend or foe, I care not. If I am to be happy, let the years bring me their gift. If misfortune threatens, let ignorance blind-fold my eyes so that they see not the coming fate. Believe me, there is true wisdom in the words of the man who wrote of life, that its best gift is to hope; its worst to know."

Of course I might supply any amount of stories about the goings on at Miss Anatesta's séances, and clairvoyant sittings. But I suppose they would only interest a very small class of people; and, out of all the records I have kept, I am only selecting those that go to make up my story.

For, indeed, it is very wonderful how just a certain number of people seem entangled in the threads of it for any purpose; and how again and again they came in my way, and played their part on the stage of life where I was audience, until, at last, they made a set of characters and a complete history.

It only shows how small the world is after all, or else that certain people are bound to meet certain people again and again, as if they revolved in a circle. If I had been clever enough to take in all that I heard from the doctor and Miss Anatesta, I might have learnt the true secrets of "cause and effect;" but I confess they got far beyond me, and I used to feel rather dazed when I began to consider myself as an "ego," that had existed for thousands and thousands of years, and learnt that there were such things as Psychic bodies, and Elementals, and astral forms, and faculties that might be developed into almost magical powers for good or for evil. They made out that the construction of the world and the origin of man might be altogether different from what I had learnt in the Bible, or at Sunday School, or from teachers and ministers—in fact, that everything I believed and accepted might be turned topsy-turvy without affording the slightest satisfaction to myself, or the least benefit to those who upset it.

I therefore concluded that in my case "ignorance should be bliss," and refused to hear or understand any of these mysteries. Indeed, I gradually began to get so used to Miss Anatesta's "séances," and trances, and queer talks, that I paid no more attention to them, or to her, than if she had been ordering the dinner, or the breakfast.

I remained with her for six months, and then she took it into her head to start off to America, and sub-let the house to a widower, with a large family, who did not require me, as he had his own servants.

So once more I was on the look-out for employment, and could scarcely flatter myself that I should secure so extraordinary or interesting a place again.